

**Diversion of Injectable or Intravenous (IV) Drugs by a Hospital Staff Person:
Frequently Asked Questions
Version 1.03
December 16, 2013**

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Questions about the Incident

DDHCVPVH 01 What happened at Poudre Valley Hospital?

- In November, 2013, Poudre Valley Hospital notified the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment that it was investigating a drug diversion case. A former employee was suspected of diverting patient drugs for personal use.
- The employee was suspended from Poudre Valley Hospital pending an investigation and later terminated.
- The hospital has concluded that the employee had inappropriately accessed the hospital's electronic drug dispensing system to access controlled injectable drugs for personal use.
- The Department confirmed the employee had been infected with hepatitis C and began having symptoms in March, 2012. However, the hepatitis C virus has not been detected following repeated tests from Aug. 28, 2012 through Nov. 21, 2013.
- The Department has not identified other cases suggesting that patients were infected while at Poudre Valley Hospital.
- It has not been determined whether the staff person employed any unsafe medical practices (i.e. needle reuse) that could have transmitted the Hepatitis C virus to patients.
- Because it's possible that patients could have been exposed to hepatitis C by this employee, Poudre Valley Hospital and public health authorities are recommending hepatitis C testing for certain adult patients in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or who were cared for by the ICU Care team and who received controlled injectable drugs from Sept. 9, 2011 through Aug. 28, 2012.
- Poudre Valley Hospital sent letters to patients that could have been exposed and provided information on the possible exposure, and instructions on how to get free testing.

DDHCVPVH 02 Who should be concerned and why?

- Any adult patient in the ICU or adult patients seen by the ICU care team who received controlled injectable or IV medications during certain days between Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012.

DDHCVPVH 03 How many of Poudre Valley Hospital's patients were notified?

- Poudre Valley Hospital has notified approximately 200 former patients by letter

DDHCVPVH 04 Were patients exposed and how?

- There is no known exposure at Poudre Valley Hospital. An employee likely diverted drugs from patients for personal use and therefore, the employee could have exposed patients to hepatitis C.
- Due to the concern for the spread of the hepatitis C virus, Poudre Valley Hospital and public health are recommending testing for certain adult patients who had possible contact with the employee and received controlled injectable or IV medications at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 1, 2011 and Aug. 28, 2012. This includes patients in the ICU on certain days and also patients seen outside of the ICU by the ICU care team on certain days.

DDHCVPVH 05 Is this activity still going on at Poudre Valley?

- No. The employee no longer works at Poudre Valley Hospital

DDHCVPVH 06 Were any patients infected with HIV, Hepatitis B or Hepatitis C from this health care worker?

- The employee was not infected with hepatitis B or HIV
- At the time when patients were first notified, there were no reports of hepatitis C reported to public health that could be linked to this former employee. However, we encourage testing to ensure no transmission has occurred.

DDHCVPVH 07 Can you verify if I received injectable or IV medications while at Poudre Valley Hospital?

Yes, Poudre Valley Hospital can verify this information.

DDHCVPVH 08 Are there other infections that I might have received from the employee?

Other types of infections usually are detected soon after exposure. These practices occurred long enough ago that there is no need to test for other infections.

DDHCVPVH 09 I was a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital. Am I at risk?

- Patients that are at risk will receive a letter from Poudre Valley Hospital.
- You are at risk and should be tested for hepatitis C if
 - you were a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012, and
 - you received controlled injectable or IV medications on certain days during an ICU inpatient stay or you were seen by the ICU care team
- You are not at risk if you did not receive controlled injectable or IV medications at Poudre Valley Hospital or you were not a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 1, 2011 and Aug. 28, 2012. Hepatitis C testing is not recommended for you at this time.

DDHCVPVH 10 I am a previous patient at Poudre Valley Hospital and did not receive a letter, what should I do?

- If you were not a patient from Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012, you are not at risk and do not need to do anything.
- If you were a patient from Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012 but you did not receive controlled injectable or IV drugs on days that the employee worked, then you do not need to do anything.
- If you were a patient from Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012 and you believe that you did receive controlled injectable or IV drugs, then you should receive a letter. If that letter has not arrived, you can call 970-495-8334 to arrange to be tested for hepatitis C.

DDHCVPVH 11 I am a previous patient at Poudre Valley Hospital and I do not remember if I received injectable or IV drugs. What should I do?

- If you were not a patient in the ICU or cared for by the ICU team on certain days between Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012, testing is not recommended for you. You do not need to take any further action.
- If you were a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital from Sept. 1, 2011 to Aug. 28, 2012, and you received care in the ICU or by the ICU care team on certain days, you should receive a letter from Poudre Valley Hospital with instructions on how you can be tested for hepatitis C.
- The employee is suspected of diverting (using) only controlled injectable or IV drugs. Patients who received only IV rehydration fluids, antibiotics, or other non-controlled injections and IVs, do not need to be tested and will not receive a notification letter.

DDHCVPVH 12 I am a previous patient of Poudre Valley Hospital and I did not receive intravenous (IV) medication. What should I do?

- We do not recommend testing for patients who did not receive controlled injectable or IV medications.

DDHCVPVH 13 Do I need a letter from Poudre Valley Hospital to get tested?

- The letter will need to be presented to a Poudre Valley Hospital laboratory as it serves as the order for hepatitis testing

DDHCVPVH 14 I received a letter addressed to my relative, who is deceased. What should I do?

- You should notify Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-7380 and hospital staff will update their records to show no testing is needed. You will not receive reminder letters.

DDHCVPVH 15 I am a patient of Poudre Valley Hospital and did not receive a letter in the mail. Can I have a letter for my records?

- A copy of the patient information letter is available at <http://pvhs.org/hep-c> or on the state health department's website at <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/>
- You may also call Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-7380.

DDHCVPVH 16 I am a resident of a state other than Colorado. Where can I go for testing?

- Please call Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-7380 to discuss your options.

DDHCVPVH 17 If I want to be tested by my private provider, what tests should my health provider order?

- Your provider can call Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-8334 or go to the following websites
 - <http://www.pvhs.org/hep-c>
 - www.hepatitiscolorado.info
- All of the following tests should be ordered:
 - Hepatitis C antibody. If positive, hepatitis C RNA (quantitative or qualitative) should be performed. (Reflex testing often is available for hepatitis C RNA.)
 - If the patient has detectable HCV, an ALT and a genotype are also recommended.

DDHCVPVH 18 How soon should I be tested for hepatitis C?

- As soon as possible. Since the employee has not had detectable HCV for more than one year, there is no need to be tested more than once.

DDHCVPVH 19 Will I need to pay for the testing?

- Poudre Valley Hospital is offering free testing for hepatitis C to adult patients that received controlled injectable or IV medications at Poudre Valley Hospital from Sept. 1, 2011 through Aug. 28, 2012 and who received care in the ICU or by the ICU Care Team on certain days.
- If you choose to go to a different healthcare provider, please call Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-7380 to discuss your options.

DDHCVPVH 20 Will Poudre Valley Hospital pay for my subsequent costs?

Poudre Valley Hospital will work with patients on an individual basis to determine the next appropriate steps. Please call 970-495-7380 for these questions/concerns.

DDHCVPVH 21 I was tested for hepatitis C less than 6 months after being a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital. Do I need to be tested again?

- Yes. You should be tested again for hepatitis C.

DDHCVPVH 22 I was tested for hepatitis C more than 6 months after being a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital. Do I need to be tested again?

- If you were tested for hepatitis C 6 months or later after being a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital, you do not need to be tested again.

DDHCVPVH 23 How long will it take for my results to come back?

- Initial test results can be known in as little as an hour but may take longer

DDHCVPVH 24 What do my test results mean?

- Poudre Valley Hospital will call you with the results of the testing and answer any questions that you have.
- You also can contact your health care provider, who will be able to explain the results.

DDHCVPVH 25 What if my tests indicated that I have hepatitis C?

- If your test indicates that you have a hepatitis C infection, you will need to discuss this with your health care provider, who can determine the appropriate next steps. If it is determined you have hepatitis C, it is important that you receive ongoing medical care and learn how to prevent transmission to others. Please notify Poudre Valley Hospital by calling 970-495-8334.

DDHCVPVH 26 If I am positive for hepatitis C, how will I know if I was infected from the employee at Poudre Valley Hospital?

- There is no way to know for certain if the infection was from a specific exposure. Testing cannot determine where you were infected.

DDHCVPVH 27 I was a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital, and I would like to report that I am positive for hepatitis C.

- COHELP, please take the patient's contact information and let them know that someone from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) will contact them.
- COHELP, then please contact Amy Warner at 303-692-2673 or Monica Molina at 303-692-2974

DDHCVPVH 28 I took care of my relative before he died. Do I need to be tested?

- Hepatitis C can be spread through the contact of blood.
- Hepatitis C cannot be spread through sneezing, coughing, shaking hands, hugging, kissing, or sharing food.
- If you have questions about your risk for exposure, you should speak with your health care provider.

DDHCVPVH 29 Will anyone other than the state health department and Poudre Valley Hospital be told of my results?

- No. Results with your name or other information that might identify you are only reported to the health care providers that ordered and performed the test and to the state or local public health as required by reporting laws. By law, positive hepatitis C results are reported to the state or local health department and remain protected and confidential.
- To release your health information to another entity, you would need to sign a release of information.

DDHCVPVH 30 Are my test results confidential?

- Yes, but by law all positive hepatitis C results must be reported to the state health department.

DDHCVPVH 31 How many people will be diagnosed with hepatitis C from this investigation?

- It is currently unknown if anyone became infected with hepatitis C as a result of drug diversion or unsafe injection practices by a former employee at Poudre Valley Hospital.
- Hepatitis C is routinely found in the population. Even if patients are infected, it might not mean that they became infected as a result of the employee's drug diversion activities.
- Because the employee no longer has hepatitis C, tests from patients cannot be compared to those of the employee to determine if they are related.
- In 2012, an estimated 1 out of 1552 people in Colorado were reported to be living with hepatitis C. The number is higher for people born between 1945 and 1965.
- In Colorado, the Board of Health requires physicians and other health care providers to report hepatitis C cases to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment or local public health.

DDHCVPVH 32 Will there be any clinics set up for testing if someone does test positive for hepatitis C in connection with this event?

Poudre Valley Hospital will offer further testing for patients who test positive for hepatitis C antibody

DDHCVPVH 33 Who was notified about the drug diversion?

- Poudre Valley Hospital notified the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, and the Fort Collins Police Department.
- Poudre Valley Hospital also notified patients that were possibly exposed to hepatitis C.

DDHCVPVH 34 When did the state health department find out about the unsafe injection practices?

- In Nov. 2013, Poudre Valley Hospital (PVH) notified the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment that it was investigating a drug diversion case. A former employee is suspected of diverting patient drugs for the staff person's personal use.
- Since that time, the hospital and CDPHE have been working to understand what happened and who might have been exposed.

DDHCVPVH 35 What is going to happen to the employee?

- The employee's employment at Poudre Valley Hospital was terminated.
- The identified drug diversion is a criminal matter that will be handled by law enforcement.

DDHCVPVH 36 What actions have been taken to address any unsafe injection practices?

- The employee was terminated.
- Poudre Valley Hospital provides most drugs without using needles. Employees are trained on safe and proper injection safety for the times when needles do need to be used.

DDHCVPVH 37 Where do I find additional information about a employee's license or how to file a complaint?

- Any consumer interested in filing a complaint related to a licensed health care provider, can visit http://www.dora.state.co.us/reg_investigations/file_complaint and follow the instructions.
-

DDHCVPVH 38 Is there one health care worker to blame for these infections?

- As of the initial investigation, no infections have been identified as a result of the employee's actions.
- Only one individual employee was identified and there is no evidence of other staff involvement

DDHCVPVH 39 Why did the employee at Poudre Valley Hospital divert drugs from patients?

- We do not know the reason the employee engaged in this activity.

DDHCVPVH 40 How did the state health department get the list of patients from Poudre Valley Hospital?

- Because of the law C.R.S. § 25-1-122(2), the state health department obtained medical records as part of an investigation of communicable diseases.
- Poudre Valley Hospital is working with the state health department and provided a requested list of patients that were possibly exposed to hepatitis C .

DDHCVPVH 41 What is the state health department doing to prevent this from happening again?

- The state health department continues to review any cases of drug diversion and will work with other agencies to promote practical remedies.
- Colorado has begun a medical injection safety campaign to promote safe injection practices in health care settings, provide education to health care providers, and provide education to the public. More information can be found at:
 - <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/injsafety.html>

DDHCVPVH 42 Isn't it overkill to notify patients when no infections have been identified?

- It is cautious but important to notify patients, because:
 - The employee failed a drug screen that detected controlled medications not prescribed to the employee.
 - The employee was infected with hepatitis C.
 - It is unknown how the employee was diverting drugs.
 - Similar cases have lead to the spread of hepatitis C.
 - Patients can be infected with hepatitis C and not know it, so it was determined that patients should be notified so that they can take the appropriate steps to determine if they are infected and protect their own health.

DDHCVPVH 43 Will the state health department track all patients who have a positive test result from this investigation?

- The state health department will receive reports of patients who test positive for hepatitis C, because these conditions are reportable to the state health department.
- Since the staff person has not had hepatitis C for more than one year, it will not be possible for the state health department to link the employee's virus to those of any patient.

DDHCVPVH 44 Who is performing this investigation?

- Poudre Valley Hospital initiated the investigation to identify and determine if any drugs were diverted from patients for the employee's personal use.
- The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment is investigating to identify any hepatitis C infections and prevent the spread of hepatitis C disease.

DDHCVPVH 45 What was the focus of the state health department's investigation?

- The focus of the investigation has been to determine if there was any risk to patient safety, assure that it was no longer happening, and assure that patients are notified of their potential risk for exposure to hepatitis C.

DDHCVPVH 46 When will the investigation be completed?

- It is not possible to say how long the investigation will take.

DDHCVPVH 47 I am an employee/former employee at Poudre Valley Hospital and would like to provide additional information to the investigators. How do I get in touch with them?

- For employees of Poudre Valley Hospital, please call 970-495-7380.

DDHCVPVH 48 Should I contact a lawyer?

- We cannot advise you whether or not to contact a lawyer.

DDHCVPVH 49 Should I sue? Do I have a legal claim if I'm infected?

- We cannot provide you with legal advice.

DDHCVPVH 50 Can you recommend a lawyer?

- We cannot endorse or recommend the services of any lawyer or law firm.

DDHCVPVH 51 I am a lawyer and would like to represent victims in a lawsuit. Will you pass my contact information along?

- No. We cannot endorse or recommend the services of any lawyer.

DDHCVPVH 52 Isn't this against the law? Has there been any type of crime committed here?

- Questions about the criminal liability of the employee or any individual are beyond the scope of this investigation, which focused on protecting the health of the public.

DDHCVPVH 53 Did the hospital or employee disinfect/sanitize/clean the syringes or IVs when administering drugs?

- Drug diversion is suspected, but we do not know how this may have occurred.
- It is not safe or effective to disinfect/sanitize/clean syringes and IVs. These are single use tools and should not be used more than one time or on more than one patient. Needles, syringes, and IVs should be disposed of after each use, and a new, sterile needle, syringe, or IV should be used each time on each patient.

DDHCVPVH 54 How will patients be contacted who have moved out of state?

- Patients who can be identified through hospital records have been notified of their potential exposure by mail, including patients who have an address listed outside the state of Colorado. If a patient moved out of state and had their mail forwarded to their new address, they should be notified by mail as well.
- Patients whose addresses were not known were notified through a news release.

General Questions (Medical Injection Safety Agencies)

GEN 01 What is an intravenous (IV) line or IV medications?

- An intravenous or IV line is a tube that is inserted into a vein to give medications, including pain medications and drugs that help patients relax or sleep.

GEN 02 What is drug diversion?

Drug diversion is the act of using a drug that was intended for another purpose. In this case, a drug that was intended for a patient was likely used by the staff person for personal use.

GEN 03 What is meant by a controlled injectable or IV drug or medication?

- Controlled drugs are classified under the Federal Controlled Substances Act. A controlled drug can include narcotics, depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens, and anabolic steroids.
- An injectable or IV drug is a drug that was administered with a needle or IV.

GEN 04 What are bloodborne infections?

Infections that can be transmitted through the exposure of blood, including the viruses HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.

GEN 05 As a patient, how can I protect myself?

- It is important to remember the possible spread of hepatitis C was not related to any health care procedure, but rather from the criminal diversion of drugs and possibly from unsafe injection practices while providing medications to patients.
- When proper injection practices are followed, they are safe.
- All health care professionals and medical facilities should follow safe injection practices and infection control procedures. Patients can and should ask their medical providers about the practices used in their facility. As a patient, you should feel empowered to discuss with your health care provider what steps are being taken to protect you and your family.
- If you suspect an unsafe practice, you should inform the physician or nurse supervisor.
- To learn more about injection safety efforts, please visit the following websites:
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
 - <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

GEN 06 How can drug diversion be prevented from happening again?

- Each instance of drug diversion has its own set of circumstances, and we continue to learn more about how to prevent it.
- Drug diversion is a criminal activity. Health care providers can take the following steps to prevent it:
 - Be alert to changes in staff behavior such as disappearances from a work shift or other unusual and unexplained behavior,
 - Track medication counts and report any discrepancies to designated personnel for immediate investigation,

- Reinforce universal precautions and aseptic technique with the staff. This should include topics such as using syringes on single patients, and proper disposal of syringes and needles. Periodically observe infection control practices
- Consider random testing of drug waste to assure that the unused drug has not been substituted or diluted.

GEN 07 Do patients need to worry about unsafe injection practices?

- There is no evidence that unsafe injection practices occurred at Poudre Valley Hospital
- All health care professionals and medical facilities should follow safe injection and appropriate infection control practices. Patients can and should ask their medical providers about the practices used in their facility. As a patient, you should feel empowered to discuss with your health care provider what steps are being taken to protect you and your family.
- For more information on unsafe injection practices:
 - <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/injsafety.html>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
 - <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

GEN 08 What are safe injection practices?

- Safe injection practices are part of precautions that every provider should follow (“Standard Precautions”). A safe injection does not harm the patient, does not expose the provider to any avoidable risks, and does not result in waste that is dangerous for the community.
- Health care providers should always follow safe injection practices:
 - Never administer medications from the same syringe to more than one patient, even if the needle is changed.
 - Do not enter a vial with a used syringe or needle.
 - Medications packaged as single-use vials should never be used for more than one patient.
 - Medications packaged as multi-use vials should be assigned to a single patient whenever possible.
 - Bags or bottles of intravenous solution should not be used as a common source of supply for more than one patient.
 - Absolute adherence to proper infection control practices must be maintained during the preparation and administration of injected medications.
- Health care providers should become advocates for safe injection practices. Providers should educate staff and other health care providers.
- Health care providers should educate patients on safe injection practices and encourage patients to ask questions regarding safe injection practices.
- Patients should feel empowered to ask their health care providers about safe injection practices.
- For more information on unsafe injection practices:
 - <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/injsafety.html>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
 - <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

GEN 09 Who is responsible for making sure health care professionals follow safe injection practices?

- Health care facilities have policies and procedures that promote safe injection practices. The facilities must also monitor staff practices.
- The Department of Regulatory Agencies regulates all physicians, nurses, dentists, in the state of Colorado.
- The Colorado Department of Health and Environment regulates healthcare facilities.
- Employers also enforce policies and procedures that promote safe injection practices and safe handling of medications.

Questions about Hepatitis C & Testing

DDHCV 01 How likely is it that I may be infected with hepatitis C as a result of the employee's drug diversion activity?

- It is currently unknown if anyone was infected with hepatitis C as a result of the employee's activity at Poudre Valley Hospital.
- Hepatitis C infection is rare in health care settings. Following a needle stick from an infected patient to a healthcare worker, only about 2% of health care workers become infected.

DDHCV 06 Do I need to be tested more than once?

- Patients tested through Poudre Valley Hospital should not need to be tested more than once.

DDHCV 07 If I already have hepatitis C, do I need to be tested again?

You should talk to your health care provider.

DDHCV 08 Why should I be concerned about hepatitis C if I haven't had any symptoms?

- People infected with hepatitis C may not have symptoms for many years. It is possible you might have been infected and not know it. Even if you may not feel ill or remember getting sick, if you received controlled injectable or IV medications at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 1, 2011 and Aug. 28, 2012, you should be tested for hepatitis C to make sure you are not infected. Knowing whether you are infected is important, so you can be treated if your test results are positive.

DDHCV 09 Have there been previous occurrences of hepatitis C transmitted in a health care setting?

- Recent investigations undertaken by state and local health departments and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified drug diversion and improper use of syringes, needles, and medication vials during routine health care procedures, such as administering injections. These practices have resulted in one or more of the following:
 - Transmission of bloodborne viruses, including hepatitis C virus to patients

- Notification of thousands of patients of possible exposure to bloodborne pathogens and recommendations that they be tested for HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C
- Referral of providers to licensing boards for disciplinary action
- Malpractice suits filed by patients
- For more information on unsafe injection practices:
 - <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/injsafety.html>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
 - <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

DDHCV 11 If a person has donated blood recently, does the blood center test for hepatitis C?

- Donated blood does get tested for hepatitis C.
- Patients who received controlled injectable or IV medications at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 2011 and Aug. 28, 2012 still need to be tested for hepatitis C even if they have given blood since that time.

Questions about Hepatitis C

HCVHP01 What is hepatitis C?

- Hepatitis C is a disease caused by the hepatitis C virus that results in infection of the liver.

HCVHP02 Who gets hepatitis C?

- The CDC and the U.S. Preventive Services Taskforce recommends that people born between 1945 and 1965 be tested for hepatitis C.
- Anyone can get hepatitis C, but IV drug users, people who received blood transfusions or organ transplants prior to 1992, and dialysis patients are at high risk of getting the infection. Infants born to infected mothers are also at risk.
- When needles, syringes, or drugs are shared, people are at risk of getting hepatitis C.

HCVHP03 How is the hepatitis C virus spread?

- Hepatitis C can be transmitted through the contact of blood and certain body fluids of an infected person.
- Unsafe injection practices, such as the re-use of needles and syringes between multiple patients, can be a source of infection in health care settings. Contaminated needles and syringes are also a source of infection among IV drug users.
- The role of person-to-person contact and sexual activity in the spread of this disease is unclear.
- Hepatitis C cannot be transmitted through sneezing, coughing, shaking hands, hugging, kissing, or sharing food.
- Hepatitis C virus is not spread through casual contact or in typical school, office, or food service settings.
- The virus cannot be acquired by drinking out of a glass used by a person infected with hepatitis C.
- To find out more about how hepatitis C is spread, please refer to the following resources:
 - Hepatitis C: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>
<http://www.hepatitiscolorado.info>

HCVHP 04 Can Hepatitis C be spread within a household?

Yes, but this does not occur very often. If Hepatitis C virus is spread within a household, it is most likely a result of direct, through-the-skin exposure to the blood of an infected household member. Do not share toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or other items that could contain blood.

HCVHP 05 If I have hepatitis C, is my spouse/partner at risk of being infected also?

- Hepatitis C can be transmitted through the contact of blood. In some instances, it has been spread through sexual contact.
- Hepatitis C cannot be transmitted through sneezing, coughing, shaking hands, hugging, kissing, or sharing food.
- If your test is positive, you will need to discuss this with your health care provider, who can determine the appropriate next steps. If it is determined that you have Hepatitis C, it is important that you receive ongoing medical care and learn how to prevent transmission to others.

- If your test is positive, your sexual partner(s) might also be at risk. You should discuss the testing of your sexual partner(s) with your health care provider. Please call Poudre Valley Hospital at 970-495-7380 to discuss testing options.
- To find out more about how hepatitis C is spread please refer to the following resources:
 - Hepatitis C: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>
 - <http://www.hepatitiscolorado.info>

HCVHP06 What are the symptoms of Hepatitis C?

- Eighty percent (80%) of persons may have no signs or symptoms.
- In new infections, symptoms begin discretely and may include:
 - Loss of appetite
 - Stomach pain
 - Nausea
 - Vomiting
 - Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes)
- Although the initial infection may be asymptomatic or mild, a high percentage of infected people will develop chronic infection.
- This infection may persist for many years without symptoms, before cirrhosis (liver disease) develops.

HCVHP07 How soon do symptoms of hepatitis C appear?

- Symptoms may appear within 6 to 9 weeks after exposure. Symptoms can occur as soon as 2 weeks and as long as 6 months later. However, most people do not have symptoms.

HCVHP08 How long can an infected person spread the virus?

- Infected people may spread the virus for as long as they have the virus, even if they do not experience symptoms.

HCVHP09 How serious is Hepatitis C?

- Hepatitis C can produce serious health problems, liver cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- It is important for a person with hepatitis C to see a physician or health care provider. A physician will be able to address specific risks for serious illness and develop a plan to monitor your health.

HCVHP 10 Will people die from these illnesses?

- Most deaths associated with hepatitis C are from infections lasting several years or that occur in addition to another liver disease such as fatty liver disease or alcohol related liver disease.
- Treatment is available for hepatitis C.
- It is important that you speak with your health care provider, as your health care provider will be able to address your specific risks for serious illness and develop a plan to monitor your health and so you can learn how to prevent transmission to others.

HCVHP 11 How is hepatitis C diagnosed?

- There are several blood tests that can be done to determine if an individual is infected with the hepatitis C virus. These tests cannot determine whether the infection is new (acute) or chronic.

HCVHP 12 Is there a treatment for chronic hepatitis C?

- There is a treatment available for hepatitis C.
- The effectiveness of the treatment varies depending on the strain of the virus with which a patient is infected.
- Your doctor will be able to discuss treatment options with you based on your individual test results.

HCVHP 13 How can the spread of hepatitis C be stopped?

- There is no vaccine for hepatitis C.
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.
- Health care providers should always adhere to safe injection practices.
- Individuals who shoot drugs should stop and get into a treatment program; those who cannot stop should never share needles, syringes, water, drugs, or "works".
- Syringes, tattooing needles and acupuncture needles should not be shared or reused.
- Personal items such as toothbrushes and razors should not be shared.
- People who have multiple sexual partners should use condoms each time they have intercourse.
- Individuals that are HCV positive should not donate blood, organs, or tissue.

HCVHP 14 Is there a vaccine for the prevention of hepatitis C?

- No, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.

HCVHP 15 How long does hepatitis C endure in the environment?

A recently published study suggests that the hepatitis C virus can endure in the environment and remain infectious for up to six weeks on uncleaned or improperly cleaned objects. This virus still would need to come in contact with a person's blood. Skin contact alone would not be insufficient.

Health Care Providers:

BBMDHCP01 I am a health care provider, and my patient received IV controlled injectable or IV medications while at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 2011 and Aug. 2012. What tests should I order?

- All of the following tests should be ordered:
 - Hepatitis C antibody. If positive, hepatitis C RNA (quantitative or qualitative) should be performed. (Reflex testing often is available for hepatitis C RNA.)

BBMDHCP02 Which of my patients are at risk?

- If your patient received a letter, that means he or she was a patient during the period of possible exposure at Poudre Valley Hospital. He or she should be tested for hepatitis C.
- If patients are unsure or do not remember if they received controlled injectable or IV medications, he or she may request their medical record from Poudre Valley Hospital.

BBMDHCP03 Should I order tests for HIV or Hepatitis B?

No, the employee was not infected with hepatitis B or HIV.

BBMDHCP04 Should I order an “acute hepatitis panel”?

- No, the period of possible exposure occurred outside of the current window of acute infection and involved only hepatitis C.
- However, if your patient does have current symptoms of acute hepatitis (e.g., jaundice, abdominal pain, anorexia, nausea/vomiting), acute viral hepatitis should be considered.

BBMDHCP05 ** I am a health care provider, and my patient received IV controlled injectable or IV medications while at Poudre Valley Hospital between Sept. 2011 and Aug. 2012. Where should the blood sample be sent?

- Blood samples can be sent to Poudre Valley Hospital or to the clinical laboratory you use for routine testing. You can contact Poudre Valley Hospital for more information at 970-495-7380.

BBMDHCP06 Can I send blood samples to the state health department laboratory for testing?

- No, the state health department laboratory is unable to process samples for testing.

BBMDHCP07 What should I do if the lab I use does not perform hepatitis testing?

- You can contact Poudre Valley Hospital for testing
- You can also consider requesting that your lab refer these specimens to a reference lab or consider contacting the reference lab yourself to arrange for testing.

BBMDHCP08 If a patient is found to have hepatitis C, can I assume the patient became infected while a patient at Poudre Valley Hospital?

- No. Patients may have multiple risk factors for infection with hepatitis C. A positive result does not automatically link a patient to the employee at Poudre Valley Hospital.
- The former employee no longer has a hepatitis C infection, so it will not be possible to link a patient's hepatitis C infection by comparing samples of blood.

BBMDHCP09 What should I do if a patient is found to have hepatitis C?

- If your patient is diagnosed with hepatitis C, you should consult with or consider referring your patient to a gastroenterologist.
- Any positive result for hepatitis C is reportable to the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. Physicians are required to report positive results within 7 days of the positive result. To report a positive test, please call 303-692-2700 or your local health department and specify this patient was tested as a result of the investigation at Poudre Valley Hospital

BBMDHCP11 What should I do if I need help determining if my patient needs treatment?

- For hepatitis C, you should consult with or consider referring your patient to a gastroenterologist.

BBMDHCP12 Where can my patient get their medical records?

Contact Poudre Valley hospital at 970-495-7380 for patient records related to your care at the hospital.

BBMDHCP13 I am a health care provider. How can I make sure this does not happen to my patients?

- Drug diversion is a criminal activity. Health care providers can take the following steps to prevent it:
 - Secure (lock up) all controlled medications and limit access.
 - Be alert to changes in staff behavior such as disappearances from a work shift or other unusual and unexplained behavior,
 - Track medication counts and report any discrepancies to designated personnel for immediate investigation,
 - Reinforce universal precautions and aseptic technique with the staff. This should include topics such as using syringes on single patients, and proper disposal of syringes and needles. Periodically observe infection control practices
 - Consider random testing of drug waste to assure that the unused drug has not been substituted or diluted.
- Safe injection practices are part of precautions that every provider should follow ("Standard Precautions"). A safe injection does not harm the patient, does not expose the provider to any avoidable risks, and does not result in waste that is dangerous for the community.
- Health care providers should always follow safe injection practices:
 - Never administer medications from the same syringe to more than one patient, even if the needle is changed
 - Do not enter a vial with a used syringe or needle
 - Medications packaged as single-use vials should never be used for more than one patient
 - Medications packaged as multi-use vials should be assigned to a single patient whenever possible

- Bags or bottles of intravenous solution should not be used as a common source of supply for more than one patient
- Absolute adherence to proper infection control practices must be maintained during the preparation and administration of injected medications
- Become an advocate for safe injection practices. Provide education to your staff and other health care providers.
- Educate your patients on safe injection practices, and encourage your patients to ask questions regarding safe injection practices.
- For more information on unsafe injection practices:
 - <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/injsafety.html>
 - <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
 - <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>

Resources:

BBMDRS01 **Where can I find out more information about hepatitis C?

- <http://www.hepatitiscolorado.info>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>

BBMDRS02 **Where can I find out more information about injection safety?

- <http://tinyurl.com/CO-injectionsafety>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/injectionsafety/>
- <http://www.oneandonlycampaign.org/>